

DIVORCE IS...

A Kids' Coloring Book



**With a special guide for Grownups
25 problems ... 25 resolutions**

**by Dr. Ken Magid and Walt Schreibman
illustrated by Erfert Nielson**



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by
**Dr. Ken Magid
and
Walt Schreibman**

Illustrated by ERFERT NIELSON



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children of divorcing parents. Introductory material is
included to instruct parents or counselors in using
the book as therapy with children.

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II. Nielson, Erfert. III. Title.

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To Kesson, Justin, Aaron,
and the twins, Mollie and Kate,
and children just like them everywhere

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although most young children can't count up to one million and most adults wouldn't have time to, it's an important number to consider. Each year over one million children experience their parents' divorce and each one of them experiences it in his or her own individual way. We'd like to thank all the unique children and parents who have attended the Children Facing Divorce treatment programs and helped us put this book together in order to help others help themselves.

Thanks also goes to a special group of professionals who work in the Suites of Evergreen Consultants for their understanding, guidance, and support: John Alston, M.D.; Paula Bickelhaupt, M.A.; Jim Clendenen, M.S.; Foster Cline, M.D.; John Hopper, M.D.; John Mason, M.S.W.; Penny McCaulley, M.S.; Ted Barret Page, LL.B. M.S.W.; Rick Schaub, B.A.; Lani Tolman, B.A.; Connell Watkins, M.S.W.

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Our secretarial staff's excellent skills are only exceeded by their warmth and understanding. Thank you Bonnie Burnett, Peggy Fetchenhier, and Shirley Roberts.

INTRODUCTION

What you should know about using this book

It will help to start with a basic understanding of what this book really is and how it can help you and your children. First of all, it's more than just a coloring book. Several years of work with children of divorce showed us that there are major questions that kids want concrete answers to and in the absence of facts, kids will make up their own answers, right or wrong. Therefore, we have taken what experience has shown us to be the top twenty-five problem questions for children of divorce and paired them with twenty-five answers. One important thing you as a parent can do now is to go over each illustrated problem area with your children and then discuss the answer, tailoring it to your own specific situation and experiences.

Both the illustrations and the content of this book are designed to help bring out what your child is feeling about the divorce. These feelings may include anger, sadness, relief, fear or confusion, to name a few of the child's reactions. It's important to let your children know that it's okay to share their innermost feelings with you. By discussing the divorce in an atmosphere of love and support, you are encouraging intimacy and trust between yourself and your kids. This increased closeness will decrease your children's fear of abandonment and loneliness while simultaneously giving your child a clearer understanding of the changes that are happening in his/her family.

Practicing effective communication plays a key role in helping your children adjust to the divorce. Here are some simple tips:

Take a deep breath and exhale any tension and tightness you may have been holding inside. A relaxed parent will give off non-verbal messages that everything is okay and the child will then feel more relaxed too, thus encouraging spontaneous communication. Overall, the most useful attitude a parent can have is one of confidence and realistic optimism, as opposed to negativism and fear. This may seem easier said than done, but children of divorce desperately need positive guidance and you are in the best position to give it.

To bolster your own confidence, spend some time reading the book over before you sit down with your child. There may be points you wish to clarify for yourself in case a difficult question is asked. Or you may want to accentuate certain answers more than others. Preparation and familiarity with the major issues will reduce your own apprehension.

Next, pick a good time to get together and share with your child. Don't attempt reading when they are tired or really involved in something else. We know of children (our own included) who would rather starve to death at dinnertime than miss their favorite television show. After a big

argument is not the best time either to try and cuddle up together to share intimacies with your child. You are the best judge of when your child is in a receptive mood.

This book is designed to be read in more than one sitting. Each issue and answer is a self-contained unit, which can easily promote further discussion. Feel free to go off on a tangent and spend more time on issues that are of interest to both of you. With proper communication, everything can become 'grist for the mill' and be a learning experience for you and your child.

Effective communication also involves being a good listener. That means hearing more than just the content of someone's words. It means listening to and recognizing what emotions are expressed and being aware of your child's tonality and facial expressions. For instance, if your child has a powerful emotion inside and expresses it in his or her voice and body language, you might acknowledge it by saying something like, "You feel pretty strongly about that," or "That really makes you feel . . ." Concern can also be expressed simply by touching or holding your child. Kids can deal better with the divorce when they can talk about their feelings.

When speaking to your children, remember to talk with them, not at them. Steer clear of criticism, whether it be toward your children, your former mate or even yourself. Criticism has a tendency to lower a child's spontaneity. Making fun of a child's situation is never advisable; however, some kids are more receptive to a certain amount of friendly teasing and touching and that's okay if the child likes it and reciprocates. What we are striving for involves a question of balancing extremes. Most children respond to their environment, so you don't want to have a consistent funeral atmosphere or one that resembles a constant parade.

Some issues involving divorce are more important to your child than others and it may be necessary for you as a parent to accentuate and go over important answers more than once, especially if you have young children. Ask them if they understand what you are talking about and clarify any weak points. Paying attention to what's not said can also be important. Avoidance of an issue that you suspect is very important to your child could indicate that he/she feels insecure about facing it directly and needs assistance.

Remember our earlier statement about trying to achieve a balance with your child. An occasional gentle probing question may help a child release some inner feelings but too many questions may be seen as prying and shut down communication. Likewise, some amount of detail in an explanation can be useful for children but too much will just turn them off.

Don't forget that this a coloring book which lends itself to many uses.

First of all, it provides an outlet for many children who either don't have the words or the vocabulary to express their feelings verbally but can easily concentrate on coloring in the divorce characters and achieve some sense of accomplishment.

Also, children would much rather do something with their hands and become actively involved than just have to sit still and listen to an adult talk about an abstract thing called divorce. As a parent, you can compliment your children's handiwork and help them feel good about themselves. Remember how good it feels when someone compliments your own work product. Allow them to 'show and tell' about 'their' colored-in characters. This provides a good jumping off place for further discussion.

Some parents prefer to let their children color in the entire book first and then discuss different parts of it randomly. Others prefer to read straight through the book first with their children so when they color later, they will have a feel for each captioned illustration. Some children choose to tear out significant pages in order to proudly display their work.

Actually, do whatever seems to work best with your child. The book's purpose is to simply stimulate effective communication and understanding between divorced parents and their children, bringing all closer together.

SUMMARY:

- It's important to let your children know that it's okay for them to share their innermost feelings with you.
- Effective communication plays a key role in helping your children adjust to the divorce.
- Children are more apt to open up to you when you are relaxed, confident and positive about the future.
- Familiarize yourself with the book and the major relevant issues before you jump in headfirst.
- Pick a good time to read the book in order to get maximum attention. It may require more than one sitting.
- Be a good, warm listener. Recognize your children's emotions as well as what they are saying. Give your support whenever possible.
- Try not to be critical of people, including yourself.
- Try to balance the psychological atmosphere in your home so that it's not a consistent extreme; too somber or unrealistically jovial.

- When covering an important point, check to see if you are understood by asking occasional questions, but try not to pry.
- Compliment your child's coloring artwork. It promotes good feelings.

Who are divorcing parents?

First of all, parents who divorce are still very much human. There is a tendency, however, for everyone but them to recognize this. They often feel bad or guilty if they are not Supermom or Superdad. Some tend to deal with these negative feelings by trying to run away from them (by being a workaholic, alcoholic or escapeaholic), while others spend so much time with the problem that they become part of it.

Let's go through some of the more common experiences people who divorce have and see if we can get a better perspective on what's happening.

GUILT: This emotion is definitely corrosive to your personality and will not help you win friends and influence people, especially your own kids. Try to portray to your kids that there are no good guys and bad guys in a divorce, only people who want to be happy in life. Guilt leads us to feel bad about ourselves or dislike our former partner. Both are destructive.

It's the guilty parent who often overindulges his/her children by either buying them an excess of material goods or becoming lax about rules and then becoming manipulated.

Don't believe that self-punishment will suddenly make things right for your kids. Go back to the times that you did whatever you are now feeling guilty about. Did you think when you did it, "Now, this is really going to be bad for me some day in the future.?" Of course not. Either you didn't think at all or thought that your behavior was all you could do under the circumstances. Hopefully, you are not going to feel guilty today just because you might get information five years from now that shows things to you differently. In short, you did what you did in the past and dwelling on it will just mess up the present and future.

ANGER: A certain amount of anger is a normal emotion especially when you have felt used and abused or frustrated about how things are not going in your life. Try to work it out with constructive activities rather than kicking the dog or yelling at the kids. Seek outside help if you find anger becoming an ever increasing part of your life. You are far more likable to your kids when you are not angry and they will come to you more often.

Along with anger comes conflict with your former mate. Research studies are suggesting that it's not the divorce itself that hurts kids but rather the conflict that they have to live with that results in maladjustment. Youngsters feel like they may need to choose sides when their parents are at odds. If they take sides with one, they might lose the other, so what can they do? Not much, besides letting the adults own adult problems. It's primarily up to you as a parent to stabilize the family and minimize the amount of conflict that the children experience.

SADNESS: Being human means that we often express sadness when things don't work out the way we had planned. It's normal to feel sad sometimes about your divorce. You should allow yourself time and space to mourn for the past marriage. It's best to do this with adult friends rather than using your children as therapists. While it's okay for your children to see you cry occasionally, it's important to explain that you're not upset at them. As time passes, your sadness will wane and could possibly even be replaced by relief that the old struggles are over.

DATING: Getting out and having fun with either friends or a date is essential to your own mental health. Your children's happiness relates to your own positive enjoyment of life. If you aren't having fun, children sometimes may feel responsible or sorry for you.

Your steady dates or friends can also play a healthy role in your children's lives as long as mutual expectations about the friendships are discussed before heavy involvements develop and broken hearts occur. It's not a tragedy for your children to know a lot of different people in your life as long as each friendship is genuine and not based on unrealistic assumptions, (e.g. "This is my new daddy.>"). It's important in a modern world to teach your children how to make and break relationships without guilt, anger and undue sadness.

DISCIPLINE: All children need rules to help create some order out of potential chaos. Children from divorced families have special needs. It's the rules within society and the family that keep things relatively stable. Adults set up those rules and when divorce occurs there sometimes exists a state of temporary chaos. Where rules are bent or nonexistent, children will sometimes test their parents and push the limits to see just how far they can go. This is 'normal' because they don't really know where they stand any more. Sometimes parents let things go so far that they end up overreacting and blow up, which tends to confuse the child even more, especially if the adult feels guilty and repeatedly apologizes later.

In short, tell your kids that although the family is changing, there are still limits and rules and they will get positive feedback when they do well and consequences when they don't. Set up a regular time to go over how the situation

is changing in the family and what specifically is expected of them. Ask for their support and tell them that as they do things for the family around the house, you will be more willing to do things that they want, too.

REMARRIAGE: Most divorced parents do remarry and often combine families which are called 'reconstituted' or 'blended' families. But children often fear and resist any new relationships that you might make. This stems from their belief that to be a part of a new family would hurt their relationship with the other parent and that your new partner might take you away from him/her. Therefore, creating a new family is not easy and requires special skills and patience. Assure your child that your love is endless, kind of like air or sunlight, and that there will always be more than enough to go around. You might explain that breathing in air yourself does not take away from another person's share. You can love lots of people and in turn, get lots of love back.

VISITATION: It's important for children to have access to both parents for a balanced picture of male and female roles. Many parents say, "But I don't want my child around that so-and-so. My former husband/wife would definitely be a bad influence," or "I'm afraid that my child will be turned against me." Our advice is simple. Unless your former mate is abusive to your children, you should allow them to spend time with your former mate. A child can love both parents more if he/she is not pressured to love one parent less. Put faith in your child's good brain rather than in your own fears. They will generally not feel very close to the parent who continually puts down the other. Children are quick to gravitate toward people who have a positive attitude toward life.

In closing, it's important to know that your children don't expect you to be a Supermom or Superdad. They just want parents who love them.

SUMMARY:

- Feeling guilty will not help either you or your child. You need to look forward, not backward.
- Angry feelings can best be handled by channeling that energy into constructive activities. If the anger persists then it may be best to seek a professional counselor.
- Prolonged conflict with your former mate can be very harmful to your children. It's better to model a good divorce and show them how best to go through a life crisis.
- Explain to your children that any sadness you have about the divorce is not because of anything that they did.

- It's important for you to be happy and have an active social life. Being a recluse will simply delay the adjustment period after the divorce.
- Set limits and rules for your children around the house. Talk about your expectations and your system of rewards and consequences.
- Reduce your children's fears about new relationships and/or remarriage by educating them to experience a gain in love rather than a potential loss.
- Understand the importance of visitation for your child and know that making a habit of putting down your former mate will probably backfire.
- You don't have to be a Supermom or Superdad to be a terrific parent.

What you should know about children of divorce

First, imagine an outer-space being visiting this planet with the assignment of finding out what earthlings who experience divorce are like. The space being might submit a report something like this:

This is really a difficult assignment since there are no distinguishable markings that tell which earthlings are divorced and which are not. There are big ones, little ones, pretty ones, ugly ones, tough and tender ones, hairy and bald ones; in fact, they even come in different colors, black, white, red and yellow. And their smaller human units called children are equally confusing. Some are calculating and show little emotion while others are quite irrational (at least by our advanced standards). Some are unexplainably happy and others are unpredictably sad. I must admit that I can't say one statement that explains everything about these humans who divorce. They are so complex. This is the toughest assignment that I've been given since I had to count all the craters on the moons surrounding the planet Dissaloo.

Actually, our outer-space friend could have made some generalizations about children who experience divorce.

GUILT: This emotion seems to be more common among early grade school and especially preschool-age children who are more self-centered and tend to blame themselves for the divorce. Many young children still believe in magic and Santa Claus. The child believes that when things go badly in his world then he's usually done something wrong (e.g. like getting caught sneaking a cookie). Now when a divorce occurs the child sees it as being bad and so he feels that he must have had a hand in it. Or the child may have once said or thought in anger, "Leave me alone," or "I wish you were dead." When the divorce occurs, the child may think that he or she caused it and consequently feels guilty. Some children

feel that if they were better kids, everything would be back to 'normal'. Parents can reassure their children and tell them that they are not to blame for the divorce. Reemphasize that it is primarily an adult concern and that they need not feel ashamed or guilty.

ANGER: The grade school age child is much more apt to foster reunion fantasies and then become depressed and angry when the parents don't rejoin. Adolescents often seem to share some of the feelings that later grade school children have, such as anger, depression, guilt and loyalty conflicts, but research suggests that no matter what age, all children can experience anger, and parents can help by allowing them to express their feelings in an acceptable manner. For example, hitting a pillow or talking it out or doing activities such as taking a walk can all be helpful toward successfully releasing pent up angry feelings.

DENIAL: This emotion is where children try to protect themselves from pain by denying or blocking out their conscious reactions about the divorce. The child's reasoning goes something like this: "My way of seeing how things really are is better than anyone else's because it feels better!" Much of this, however, is done on an unconscious level. A child may fantasize that his dad is dead rather than accept the belief that his father actually chose to leave home. Other children are afraid to express their angry feelings about the divorce and try to control them by denial of any feelings. Once again, parents can best help by encouraging the expression of feelings by the child in an atmosphere of mutual support. Parents can model how the expression of feelings has been helpful to them and also use fun stories to make their points. The story of how an ostrich hides from his fears by putting his head in the sand has always been a favorite of children who easily see the folly of such a maneuver.

SADNESS AND DEPRESSION: It's quite normal for a child to experience deep hurt and sadness when a parent leaves the home. For a young child, it's a confusing, frustrating experience over which he or she has no control. Often children will beg and plead with a parent not to leave, thinking that their love will make them stay. When the parent leaves, some children may feel like their offering of love didn't make a difference and therefore, they are unworthy of love or unlovable.

Many parents get caught up by their children's grief and feel so sorry for them, that they cannot be much help. Others try to keep their children from feeling sadness by artificially pumping them up or urging them to be brave. Children often need to grieve and let go of some very deep feelings of loss. Rather than trying to rapidly overcome sadness, it's better to listen to your kids and allow them time to share how they feel with you. With your help, these feelings will soon be replaced by more positive thoughts.

SUMMARY:

There are many other feelings that your children might experience but overall, if you model happiness for them and don't get hooked by your own guilt, anger, denial or depression, then they will not only survive but learn some valuable lessons about how to successfully live through a life crisis.

Here are some closing thoughts:

- Reassure your child that he or she is not to blame for the divorce. It's mostly an adult problem.
- Allow your children to express angry feelings but educate them about acceptable versus unacceptable ways to do it.
- Encourage your child to express feelings about the divorce instead of 'holding everything inside' and denying that something of major importance has happened to his family.
- Allow time and space for your child to grieve. Be empathetic and share the sadness without being overcome by it.
- Don't use children as messengers between spouses.
- Don't leave kids in the dark about the details of their future, such as custody or visitation arrangements. Reassure them that they will be taken care of.
- Don't forget that your demonstrated love will conquer almost any obstacle between you and your child.

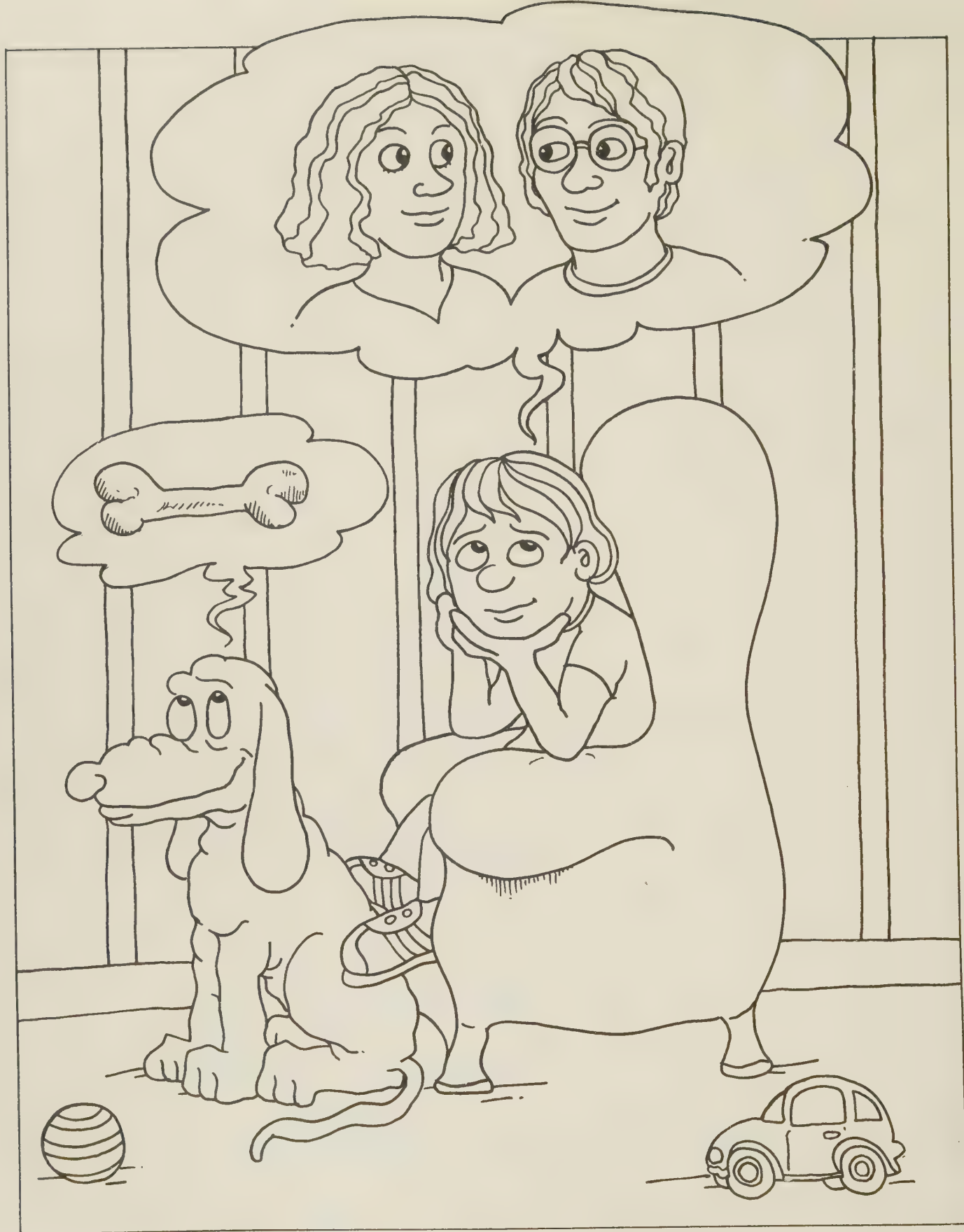
A NOTE TO TEACHERS AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

This book has been a successful adjunct treatment tool for the therapeutic intervention system of the Children Facing Divorce program. For further information on didactic and experiential uses, including video tape packages, write to:

Dr. Ken Magid
P.O. Box 14
Evergreen, Colorado 80439



Hi. My name is Kim, and this is my dog Ralph.
This is a book about divorce.
My parents just got divorced, so I can tell you all about it.



Divorce is wishing that Mom and Dad
would get back together again . . .



But Mom and Dad probably won't get back together
no matter how hard I wish.



Sometimes I don't want anyone to know how I feel.
I wish I had a shell to hide in...



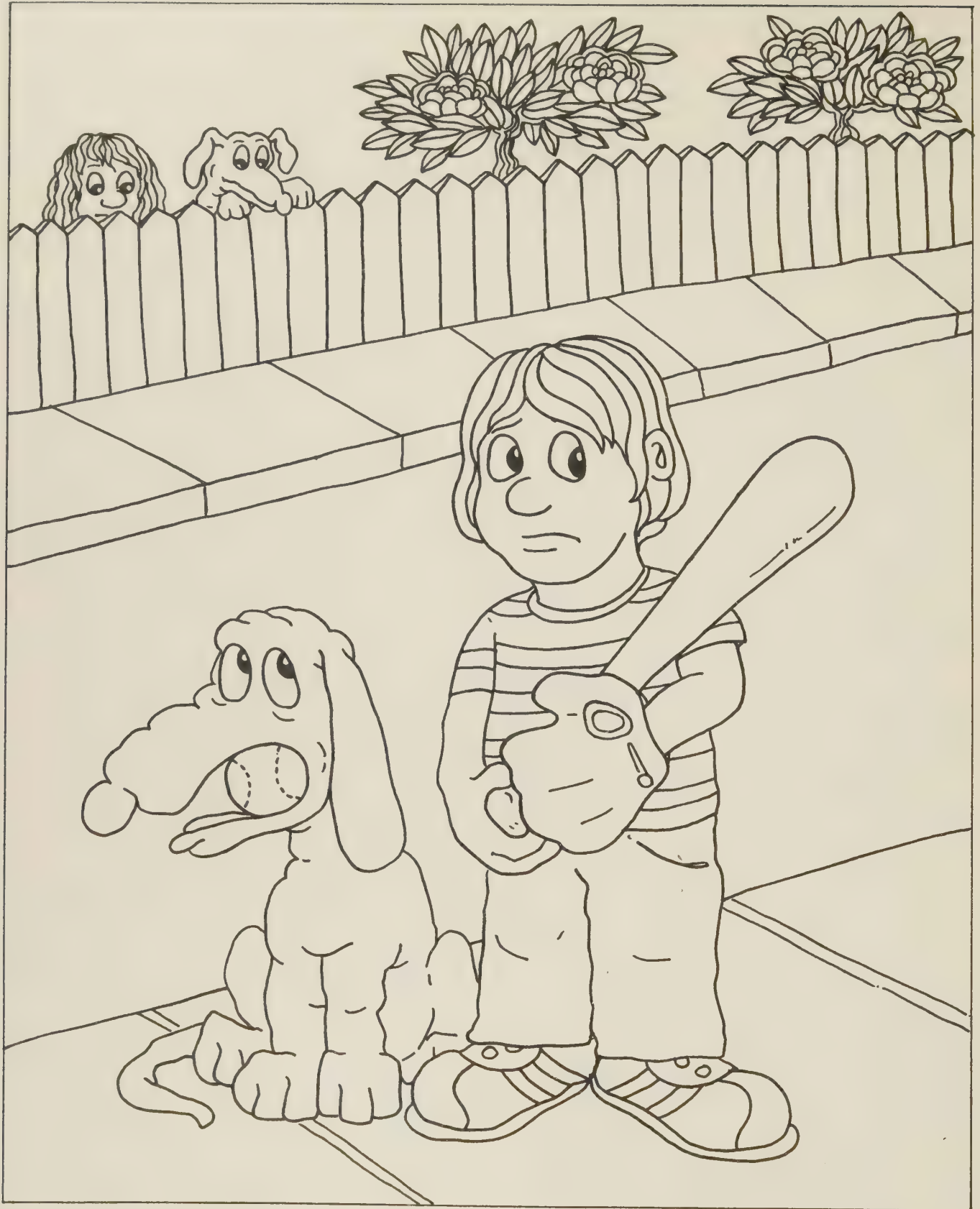
Other times I want to share my feelings with people.
That makes me feel better.



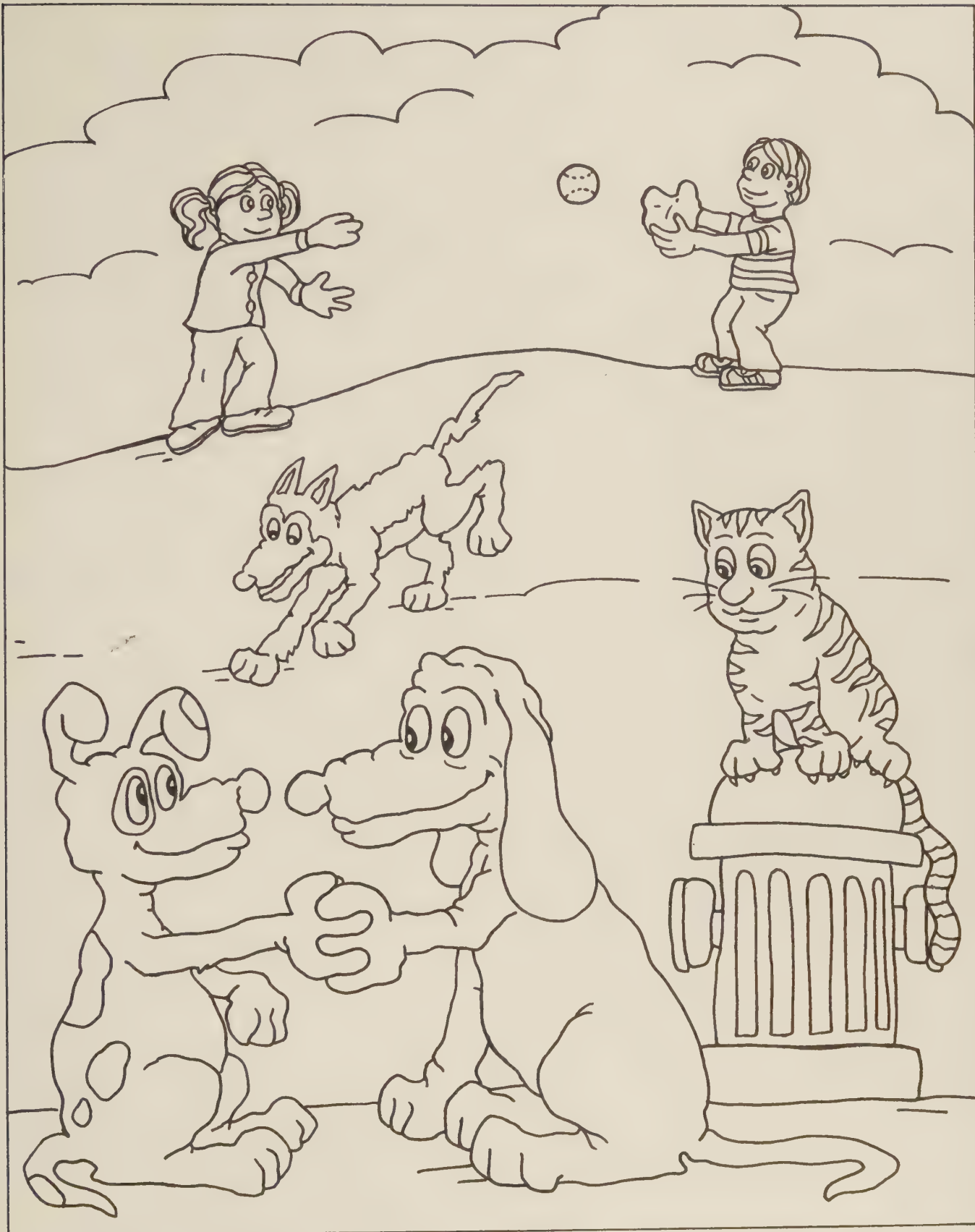
Divorce is remembering how embarrassed and alone I felt when my parents first got divorced...



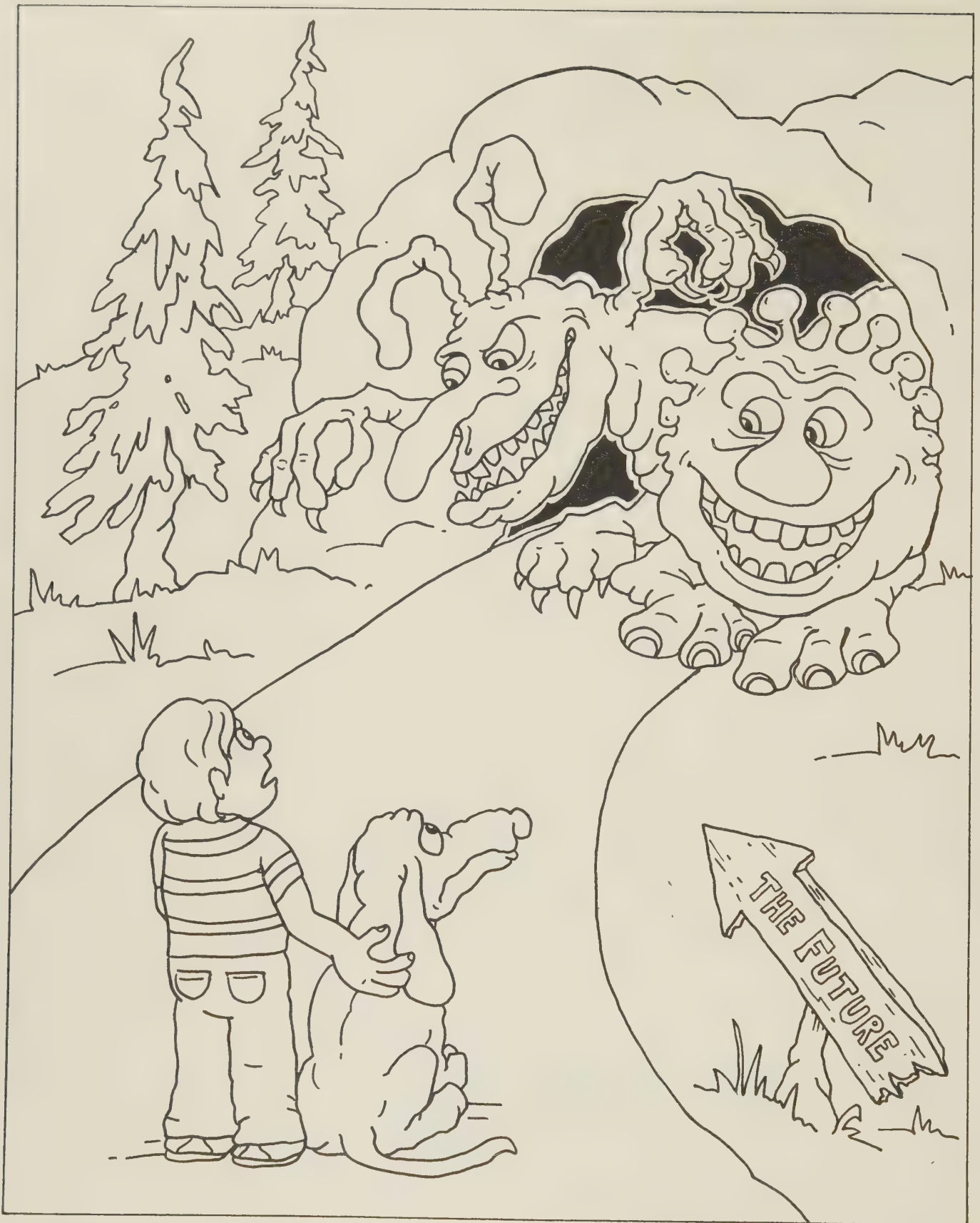
But divorce is something that happens to
all kinds of kids, and I wasn't alone after all.



Divorce is sometimes having to move
to a new neighborhood and feeling scared...



Divorce is finding lots of new friends
to play with.



I often wonder what will happen to me
after the divorce ...



Divorce doesn't have to be so bad,
especially when I learn to face my fears.



Sometimes I think that if I had behaved better,
Mom and Dad wouldn't have separated . . .



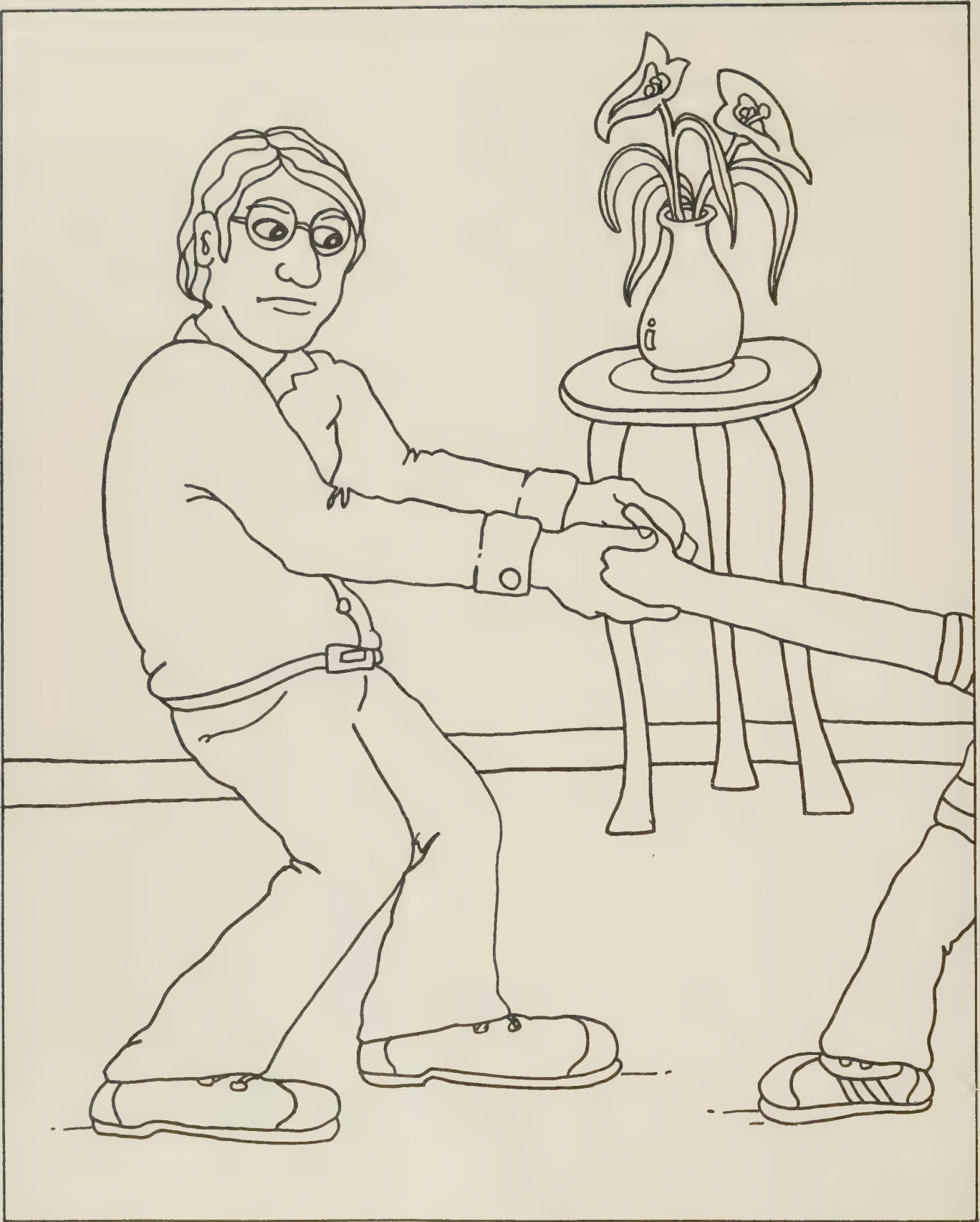
But Mom and Dad told me that even if kids were perfect angels parents would still get divorced, because divorce is an adult problem.



Divorce is remembering how things were
when Mom and Dad lived together ...



Divorce is knowing that parents
can be happy living apart too.



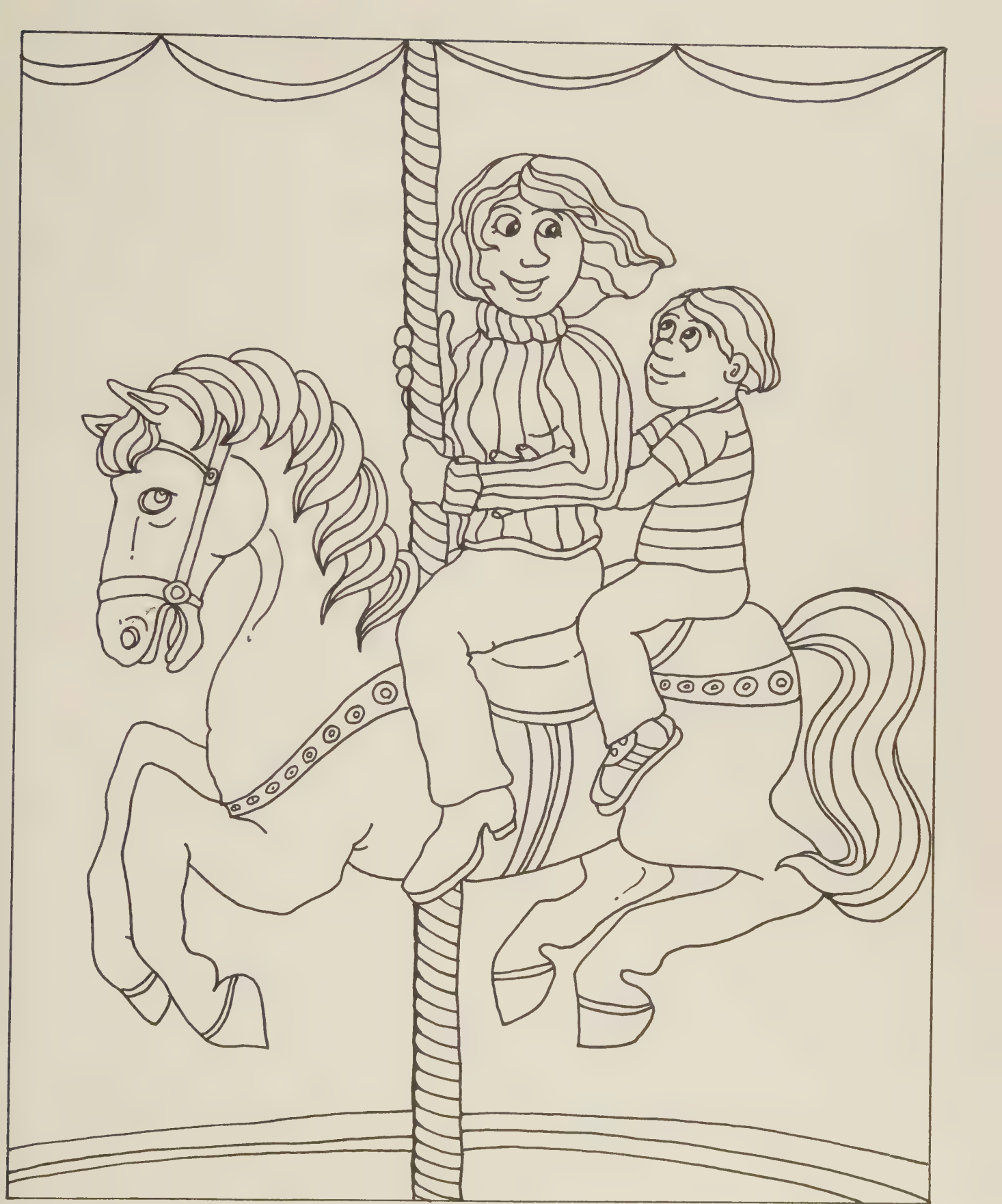
Sometimes I feel like I have to choose
between Dad...



and Mom.



Even though Mom and Dad don't live together anymore,
I can still have fun with Dad...



or do something special with Mom.



Divorce is needing to help more around the house
now that Mom has so much to do.



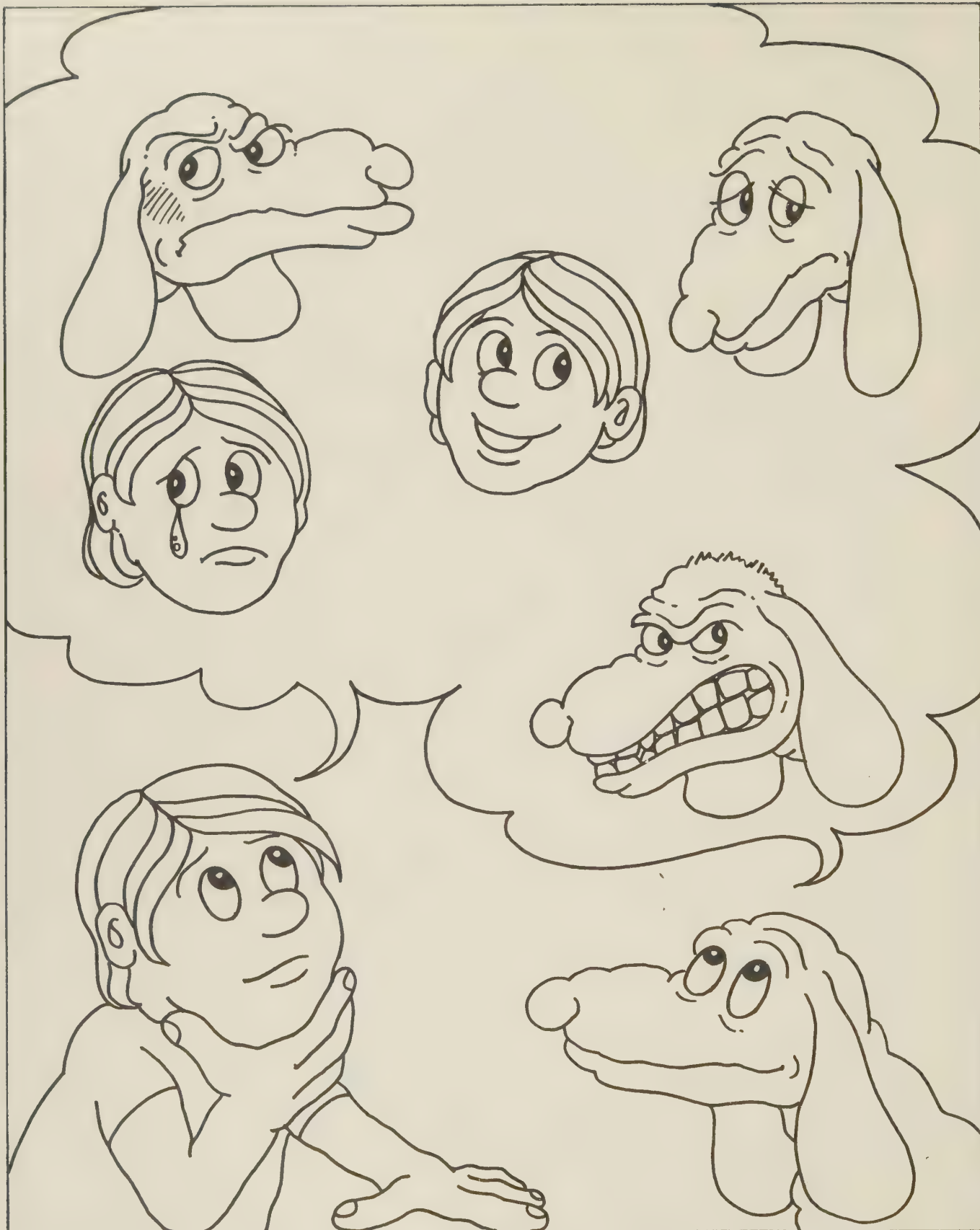
It's nice to know that I'm needed.



Divorce is feeling funny
when Mom and Dad start dating other people ...



But adults need time for fun too.



Divorce is having many different feelings
at the same time ...



A statue has to keep the same face forever,
but we can change ours every day.



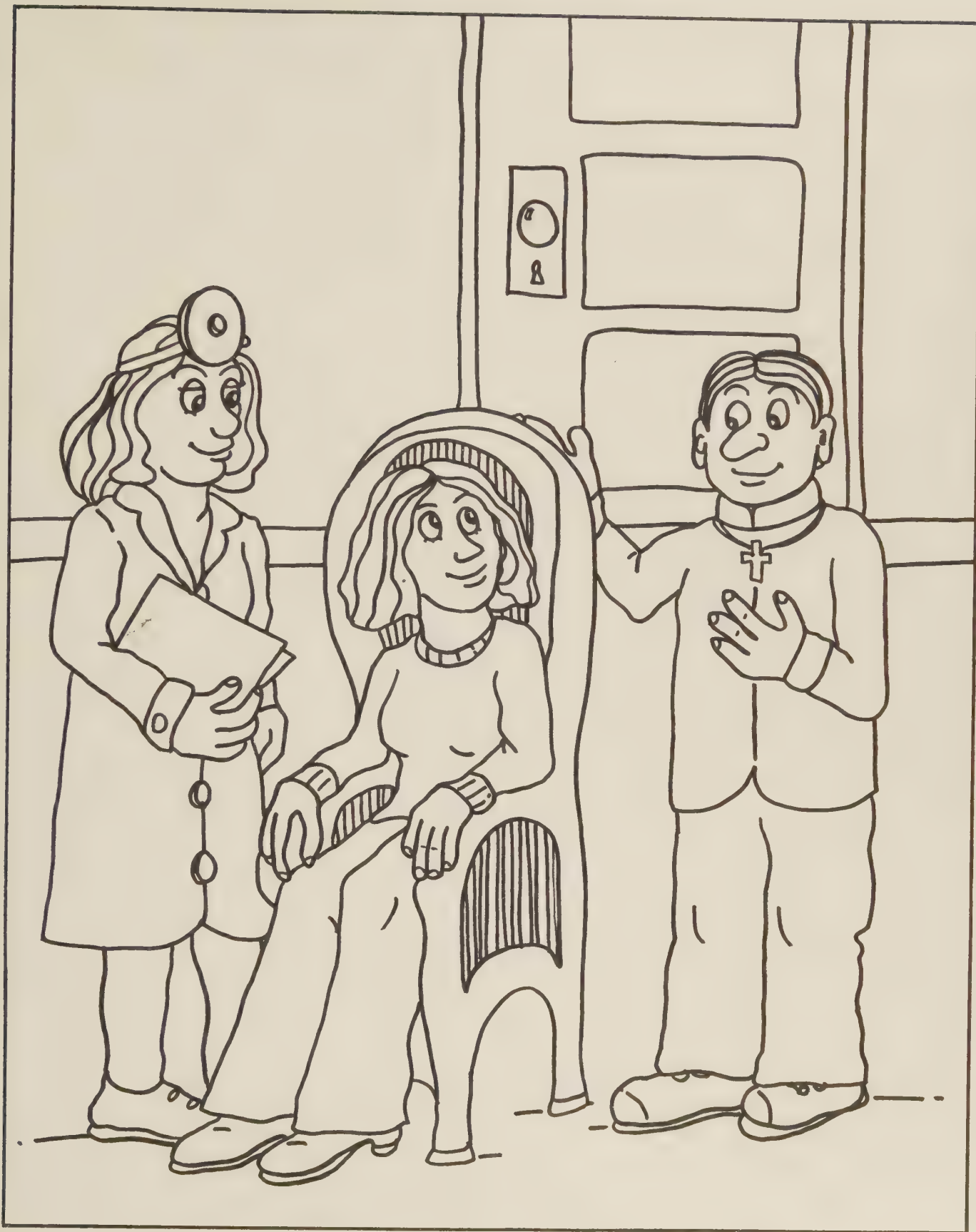
Divorce is sometimes wanting to
tie up your bad feelings.



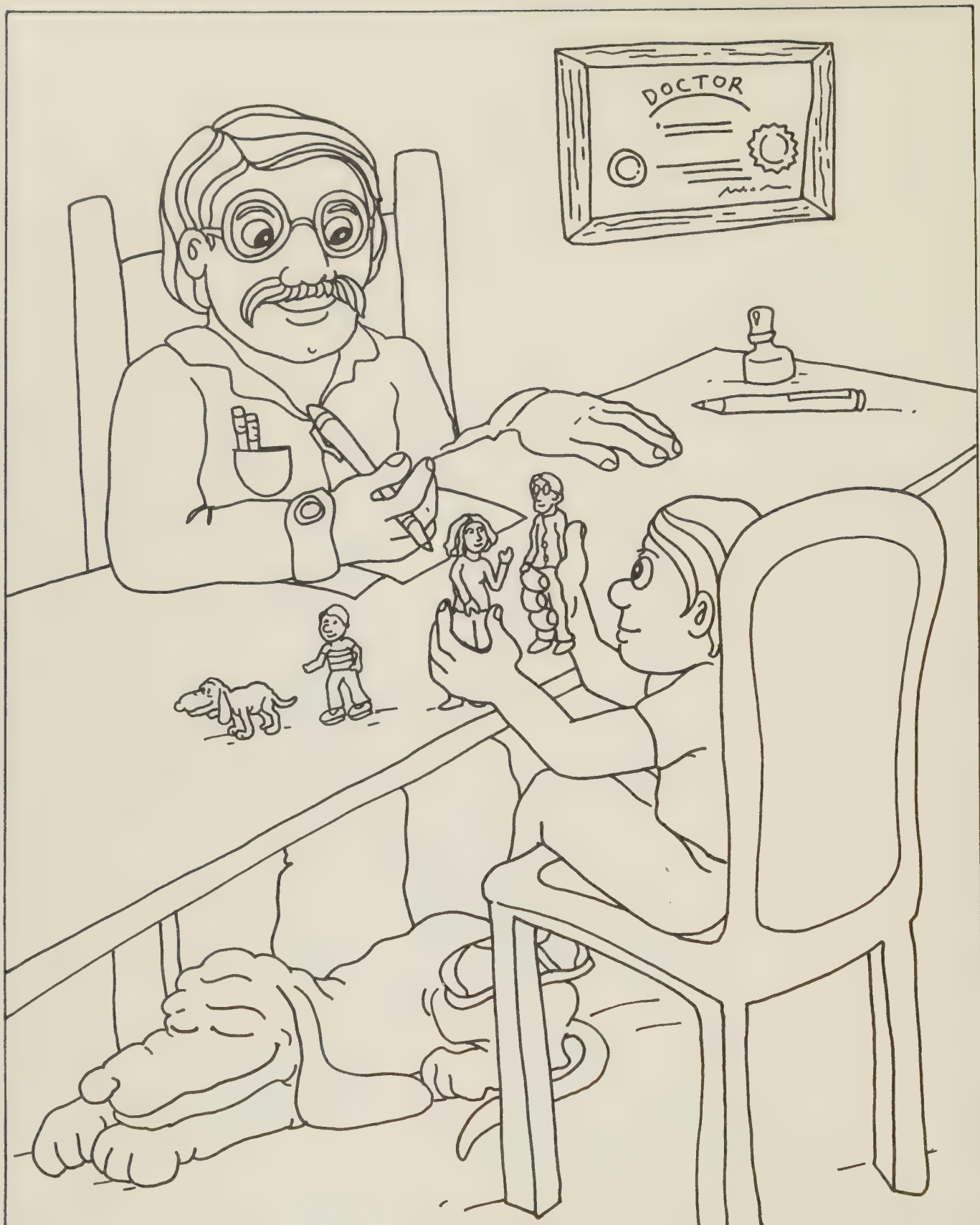
Some divorce feelings
don't need to be on a leash.



Divorce is learning that I can't solve
Mom and Dad's problems no matter how hard I try ...



Adults, not kids, can help Mom and Dad with their divorce problems best. What a relief!



Divorce is sometimes seeing a counselor
who can make you feel better faster ...



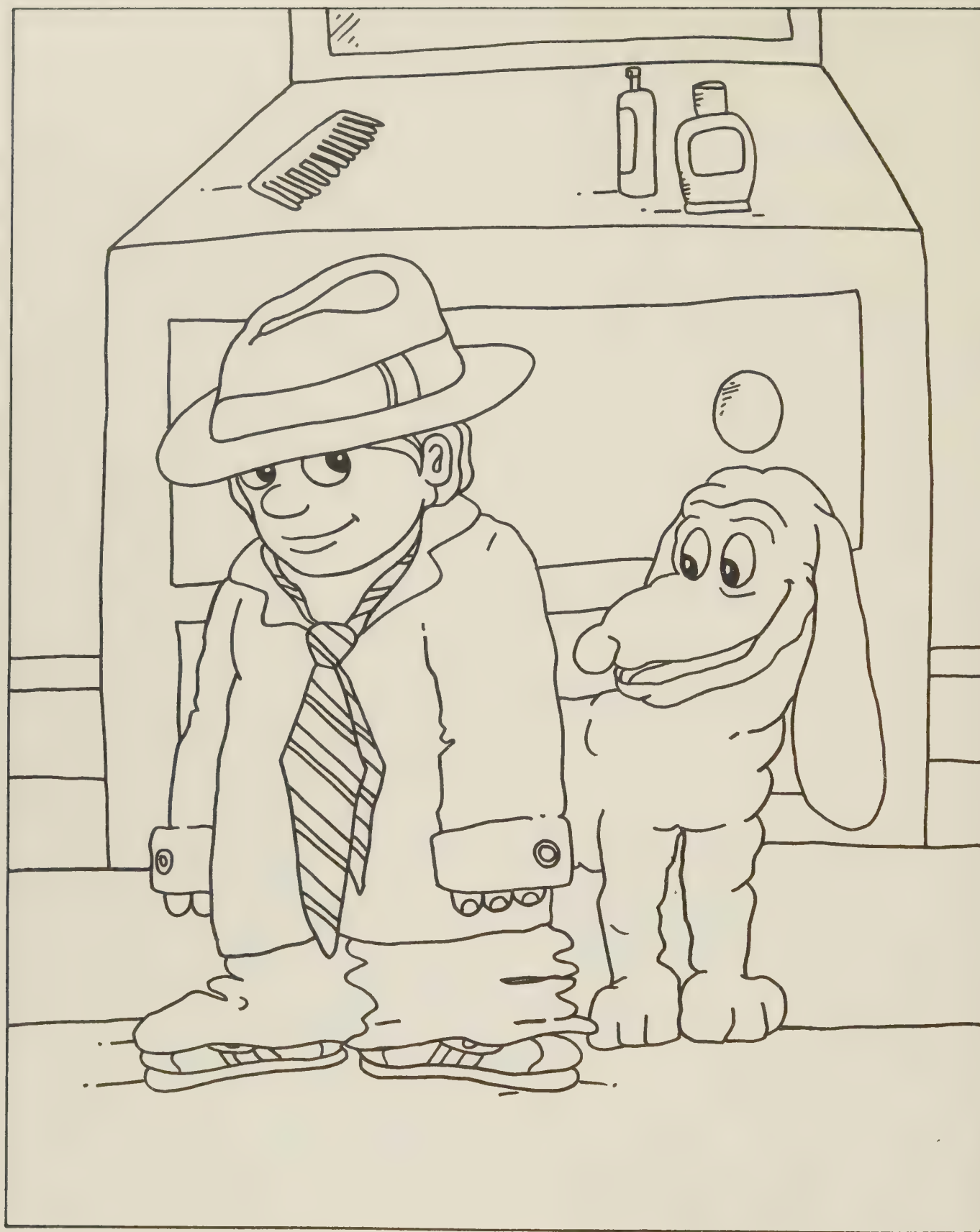
It sure is nice to know that
kids don't cause divorce.



Sometimes I like to be by myself so I can think about all the new feelings I have ...



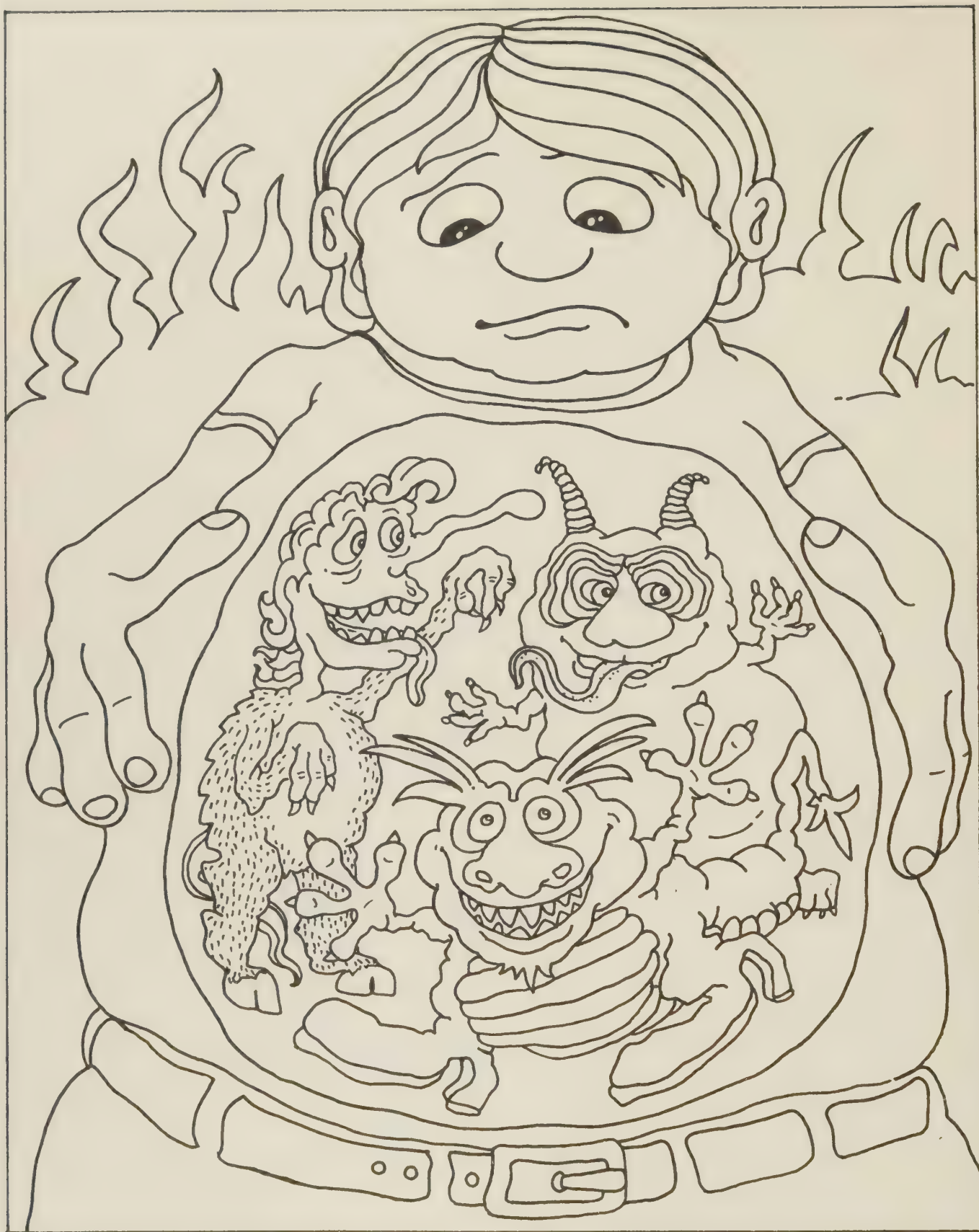
Draw some of the feelings
you have about divorce.



Sometimes I like to pretend
I'm all grown up ...



Other times I want to be taken care of again,
just like when I was little.



When I think about Mom and Dad's divorce
I feel like I have monsters inside me ...



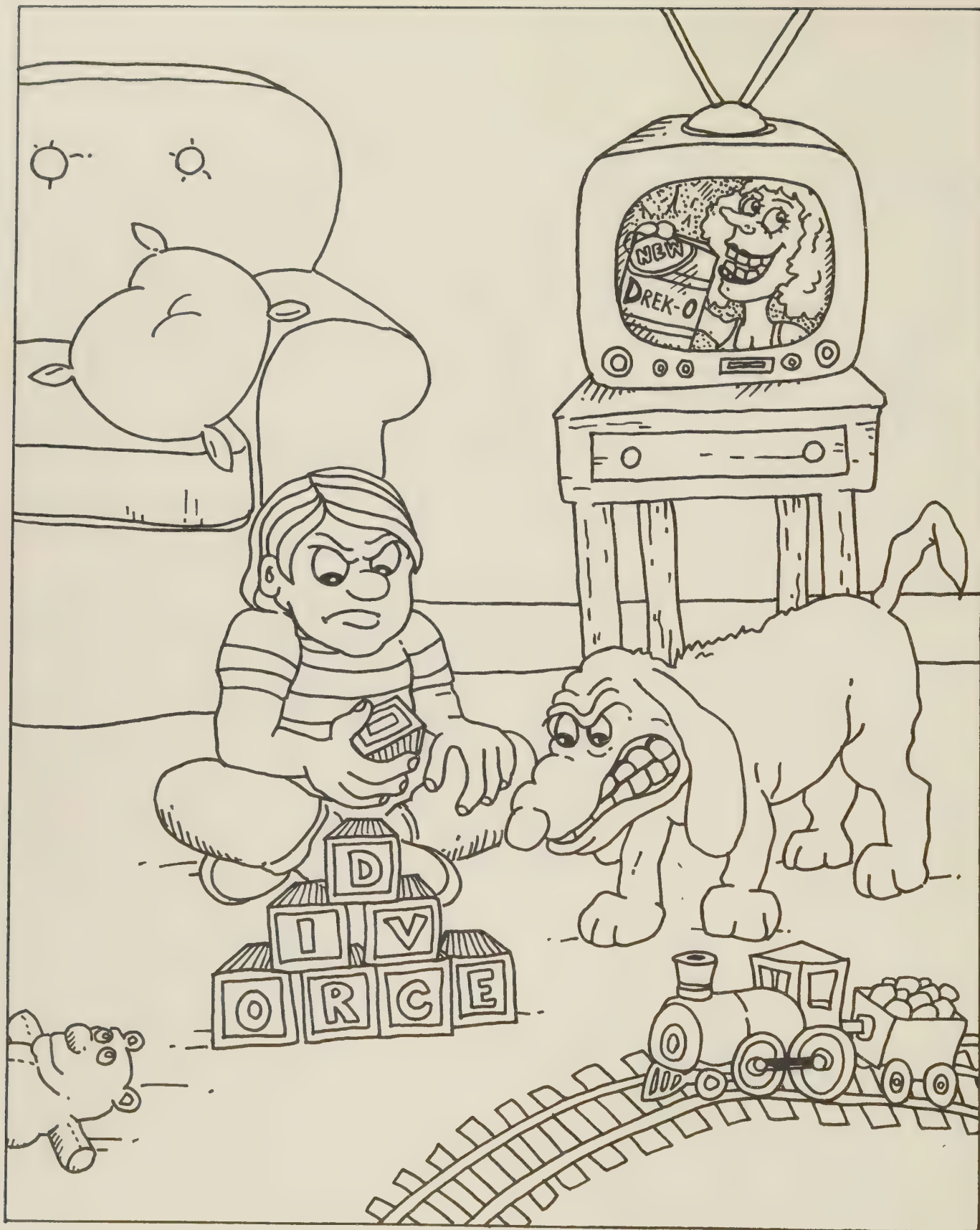
But when I talk about my feelings
the monsters all go away.



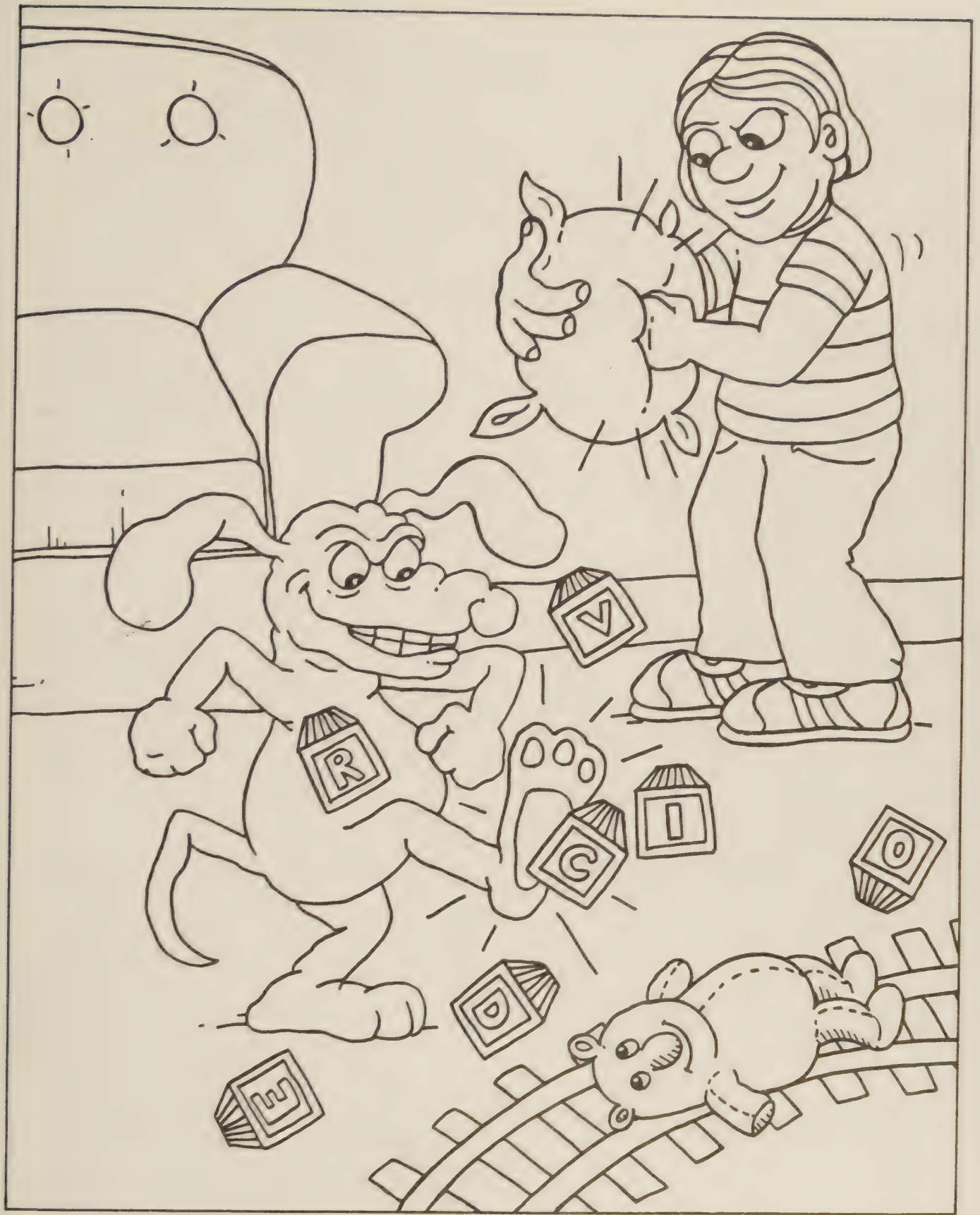
People called lawyers help Mom and Dad
talk to each other about the divorce ...



Divorce is when a judge listens to Mom
and Dad's problems and decides what's best.



Sometimes I get really mad because
Mom and Dad are divorcing ...



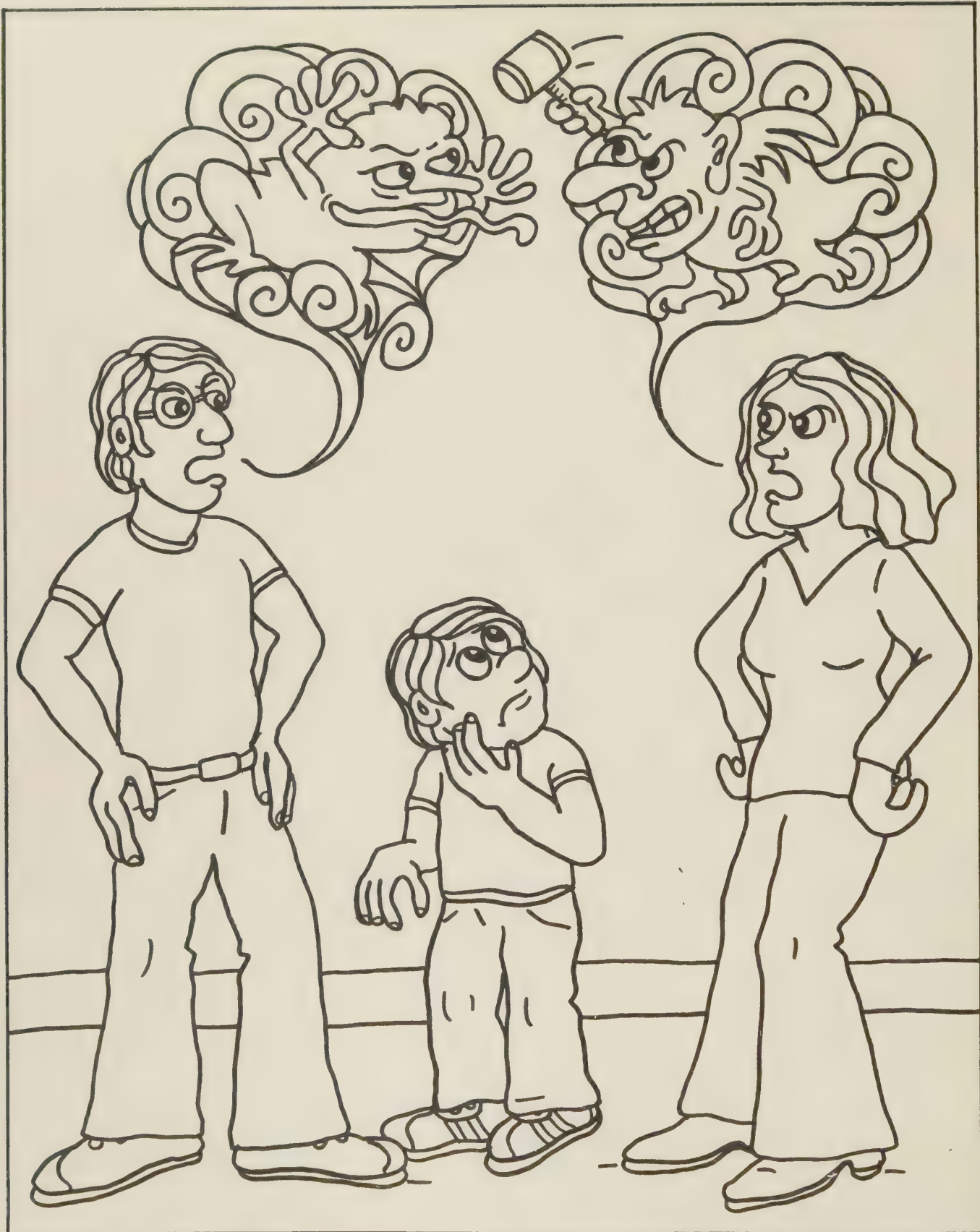
I found that letting my angry feelings out in a harmless way helps me to feel better.



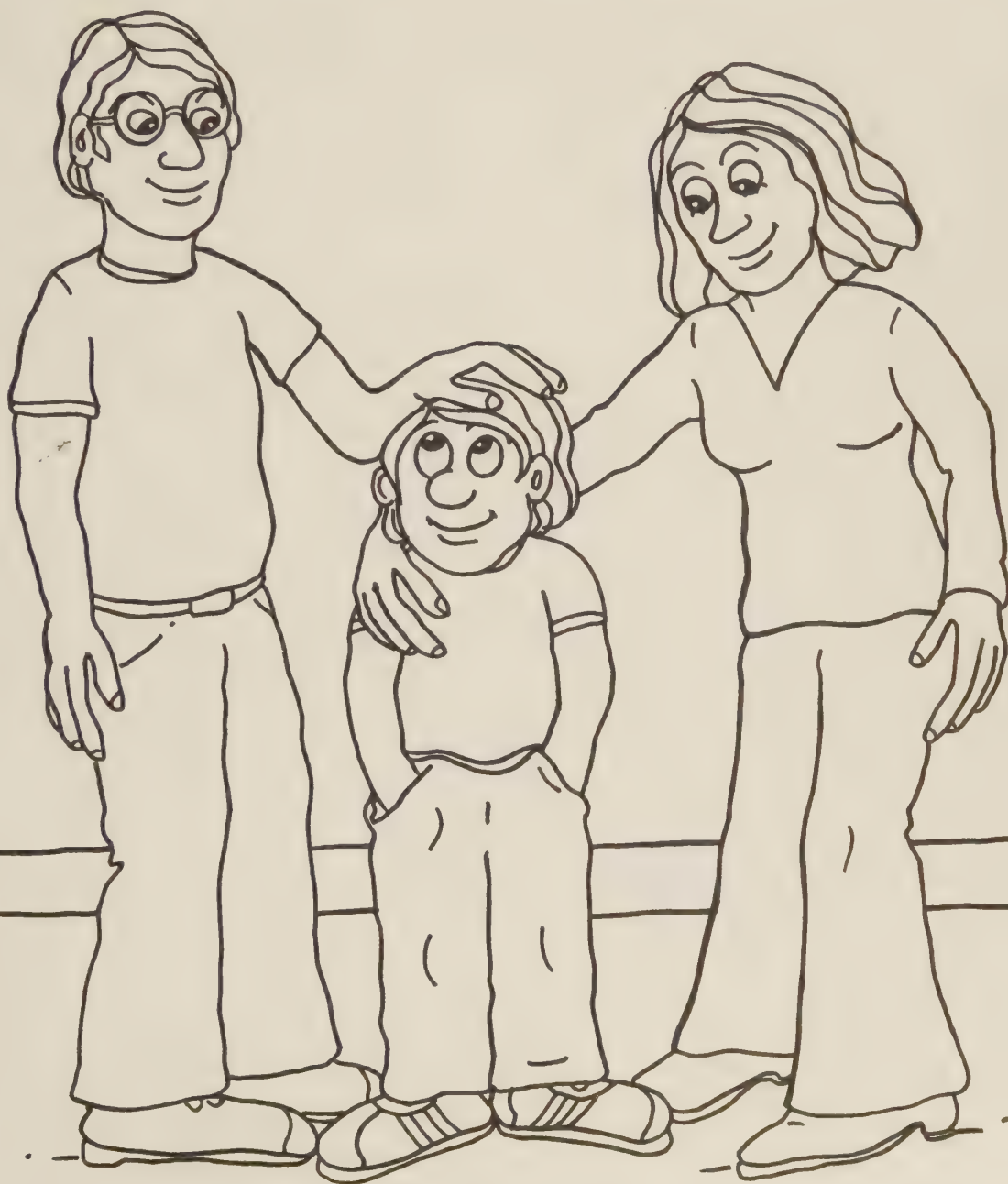
When Dad and Mom first divorced I worried
that I would be left all alone . . .



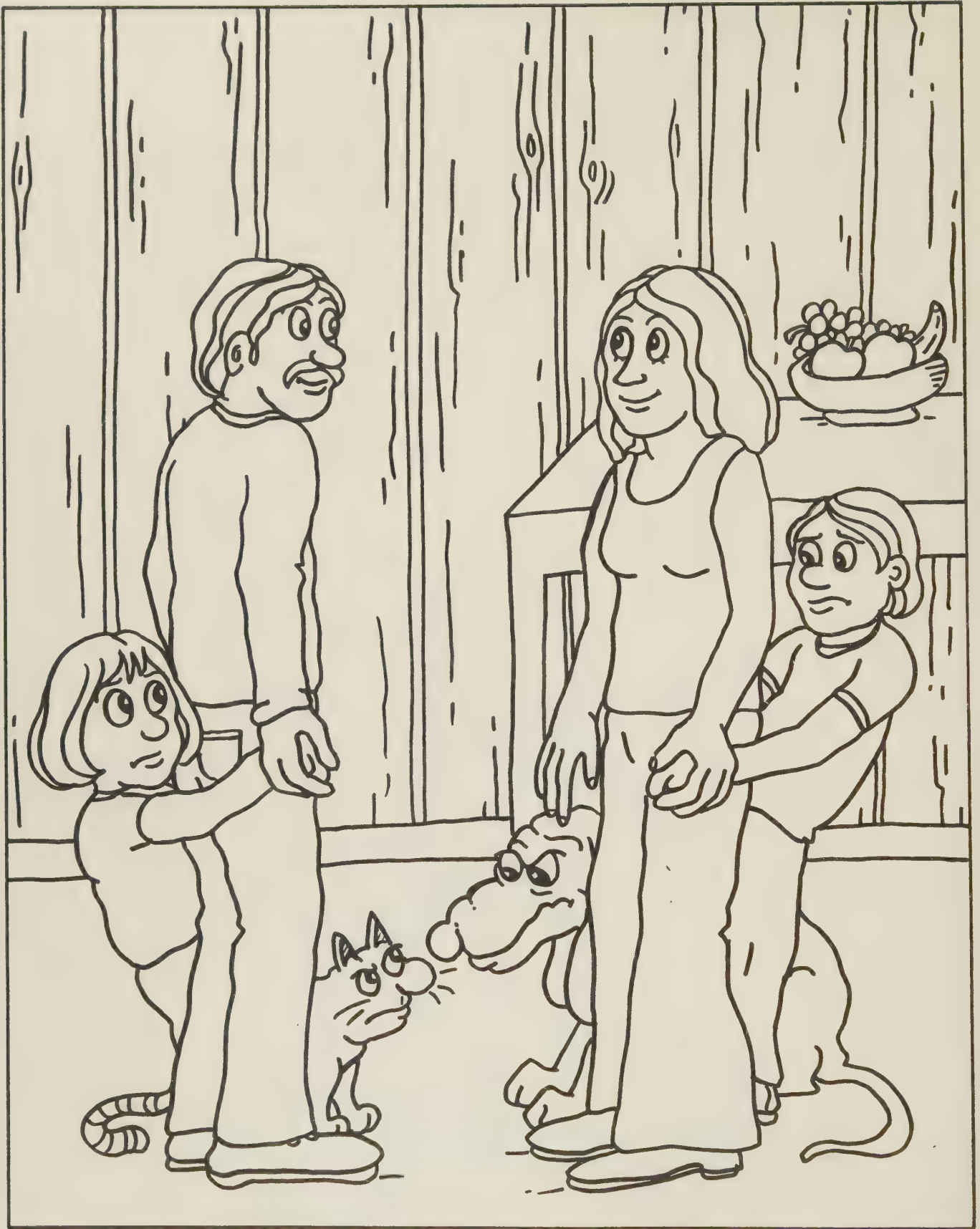
I felt better when my parents told me that they'd take care of me, and I wouldn't have to be alone.



Divorce is when Mom and Dad sometimes
say things they don't really mean . . .



But when Mom and Dad get mad at each other,
that doesn't mean they're mad at me.



After the divorce, parents sometimes
marry someone else, and then you may have
new brothers and sisters . . .



In new families, there are simply lots more people to cooperate with and get love from.



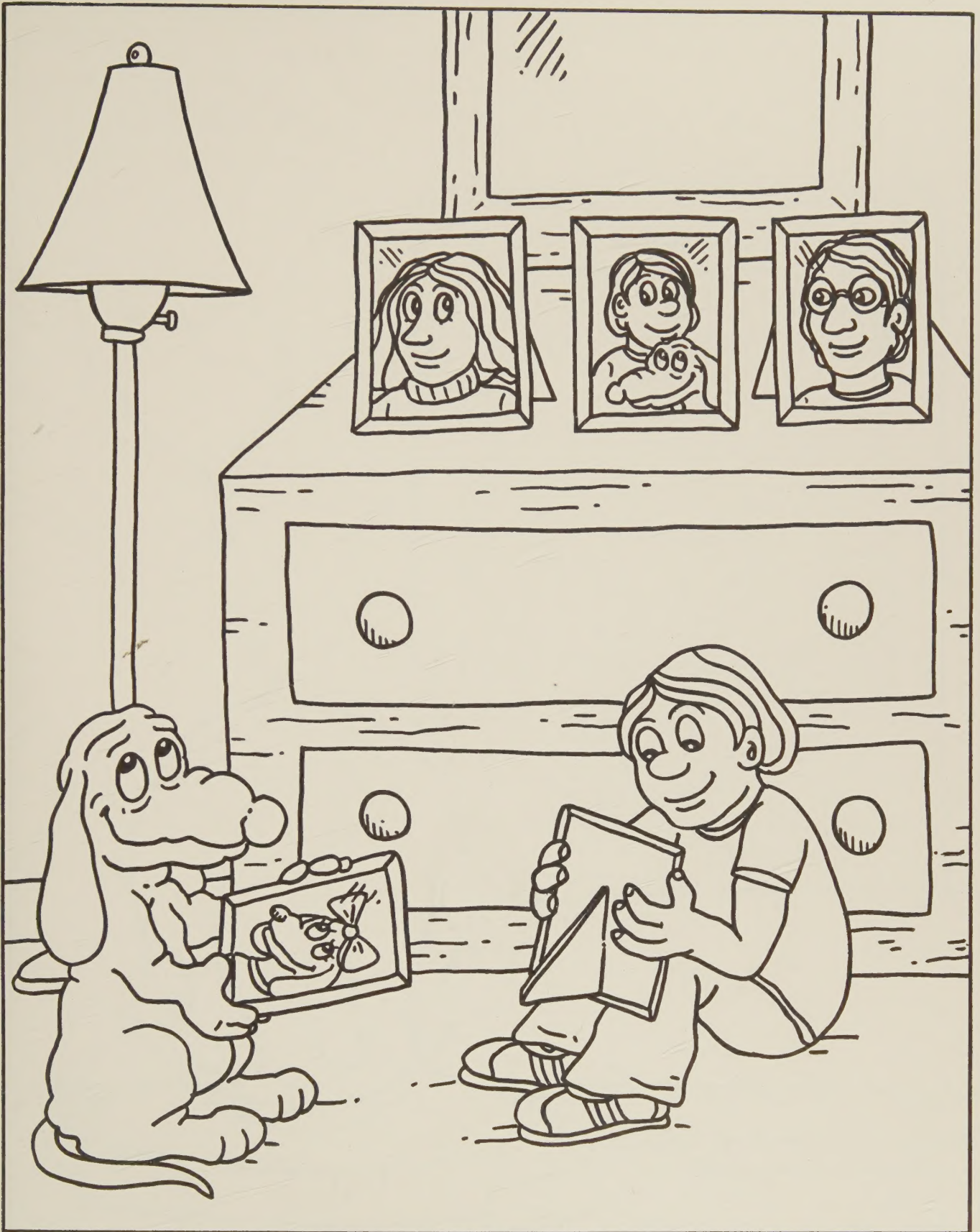
Divorce is when you sometimes have scary dreams . . .



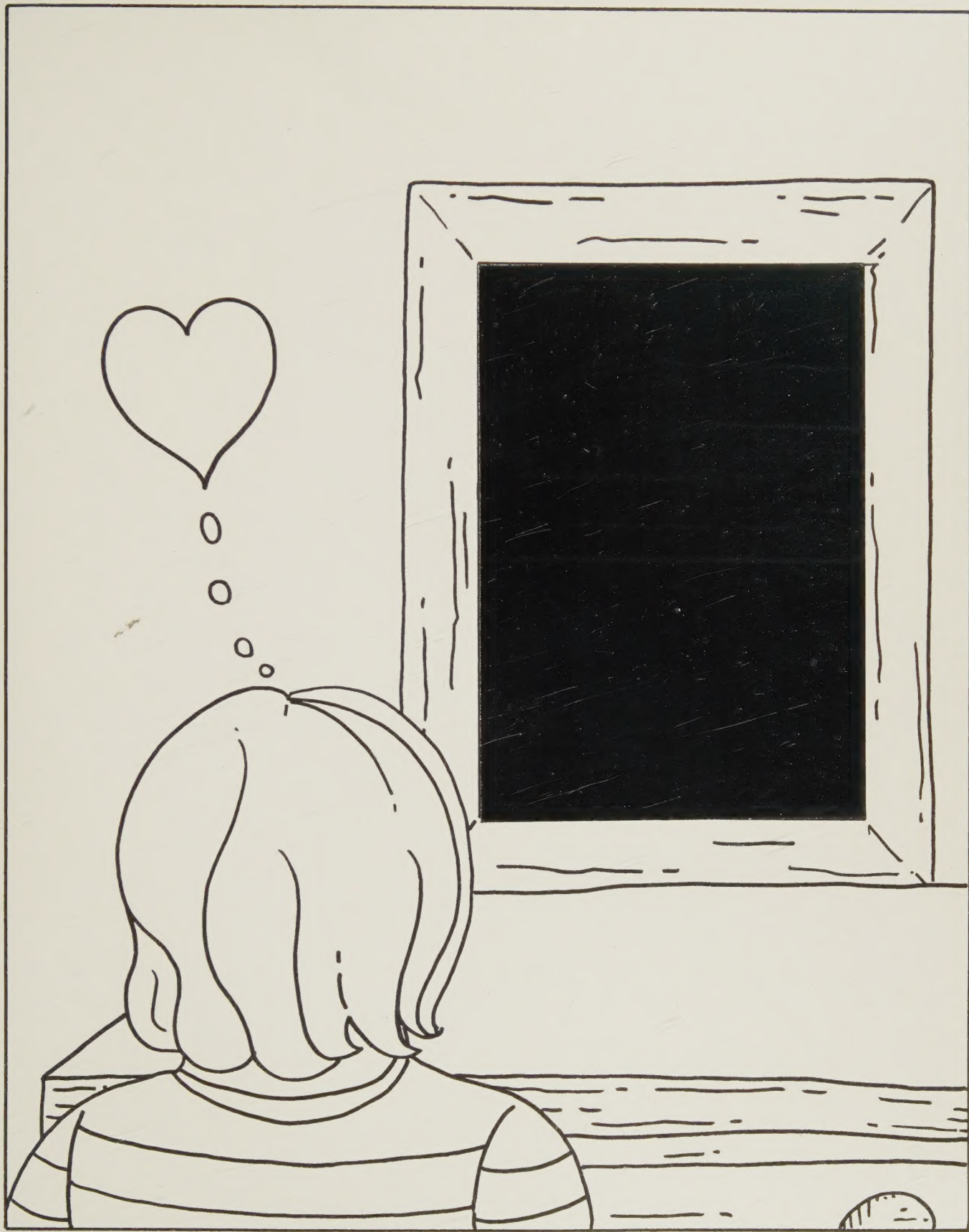
But bad dreams can't hurt you.



Divorce is when everybody is looking
for the same thing ... Happiness!



It's nice to love and be loved,
but you can't forget to love someone very special.
Do you know who that is?



YOURSELF!

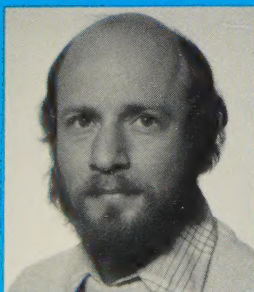
A COMPLEX PROBLEM EXPLAINED IN A WAY KIDS CAN UNDERSTAND

HELPFUL INSTRUCTIONS AND INSIGHTS ON DIVORCE FOR ADULTS TOO.

- 25 problem issues common to divorce and separation, paired with 25 resolutions to help children adjust more effectively.
- An explanation of the major divorce issues of Guilt, Anger, Depression, Dating, Visitation, and more.
- Illustrations that kids relate to based upon research from the internationally recognized Children Facing Divorce treatment program in Evergreen, Colorado.



Dr. KEN MAGID is a licensed clinical psychologist and maintains a private practice in the Suites of Evergreen Consultants, where he specializes in marriage and family therapy. He is also a certified teacher in Colorado and holds two Masters Degrees from the University of South Florida and a doctorate from the University of Denver. He founded the Children Facing Divorce treatment program and his work has been frequently featured in the media, including NBC's Today Show, Woman's Day magazine, and The Big Blue Marble. Ken has three boys.



WALT SCHREIBMAN has a Master's Degree in Child Development from Purdue University. For the past ten years, he has taught Child Psychology at the Community College of Denver. In addition, Mr. Schreibman has been in private practice as a marriage and family counselor and has served four years as Co-Director of the Children Facing Divorce program. Walt has twin daughters.

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